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SOVIET TACTICS IN THE BERLIN CRISIS

Soviet leaders were confident that Khrushchev's meeting with President Kennedy at Vienna last June would open the way for a new round of East-West negotiations on Berlin and Germany. They embarked on a program designed to induce the West to take the initiative in proposing negotiations and to create the most favorable conditions for extracting Western concessions.

In speeches on 15 and 21 June, Khrushchev moved to sharpen the sense of urgency surrounding the Berlin question by declaring that the USSR would sign a separate peace treaty with East Germany if there were no East-West agreement by the end of 1961. He also warned that the Soviet Government might be obliged to increase defense allotments and strengthen its armed forces. To lend substance to this warning, he announced on 8 July the suspension of force reductions planned for 1961 and an increase of over 3 billion rubles in defense allocations. Soviet officials stated privately at this time that Khrushchev's new deadline was aimed only at overcoming the West's "delaying tactics" and forcing it into negotiations by the end of the year.

Moscow's attempts to impress the West with Soviet strength and resolution produced extreme alarm in East Germany which was registered

in a sharp increase in the number of refugees fleeing to West Berlin. The July figure of 30,444 was the highest for any month since 1953. The refugee flow reached near-panic proportions in the first week of August and sent Ulbricht off to the USSR for hurried consultations.

Soviet leaders previously had been reluctant to sanction East German action to halt the refugee flow because they realized this would advertise the weakness and vulnerability of the Ulbricht regime and damage the Soviet position in negotiations on Berlin and Germany. Sealing of the borders around West Berlin had long been planned as one of the consequences of a separate peace treaty with East Germany. The flood of refugees, however, forced the hands of the Soviet and East German leaders and compelled them to alter the timing of this action. They recognized that the only way to salvage some vestige of authority for the East German regime and possibly to avert its eventual collapse was to apply extreme measures to close the sector border.

It seems likely that these measures--as well as subsequent Soviet military moves, including the resumption of nuclear tests--were formally set forth at the meeting of the first secretaries of the Warsaw Pact Communist parties in Moscow from 3 to 5 August.

Reaction to US Position

The period in late July and early August when Khrushchev was forced to deal with the refugee problem coincided with a new shock from the US in the form of President Kennedy's address to the nation on the Berlin problem on 25 July. This address had a deep impact on the Soviet leadership. Khrushchev's reaction suggests that he interpreted the address as indicating that the United States would be willing to negotiate only on the basis of existing Allied rights in West Berlin and that it would reject any solution which implied a change in the present legal basis of the West's position in the city.

Khrushchev told the Soviet people in a radio-television speech on 7 August that President Kennedy "did not stop at presenting to us something in the way of an ultimatum." He declared that "it must be said frankly that at present the Western powers are pushing the world to a dangerous divide, and the emergence of a threat of an armed attack by the imperialists on the socialist states cannot be excluded."

Khrushchev responded to the "challenge" by strengthening his commitment to sign a German peace treaty. He asserted that if the USSR renounced the treaty, the Western powers "would regard this as a strategic breakthrough and would widen the range of their demands at once." Although Khrushchev thus felt obliged to adopt an even more militant and unyielding attitude, he evinced concern that this process of East-West demonstrations and counterdemonstrations

would tend to transform what he had consistently tried to represent as strictly a political and legal issue into an undisguised test of national will, prestige, and power. In a speech on 11 August, the Soviet premier took pains to hold the door open to negotiations and said the Berlin question itself would not be so difficult to solve, provided the issue was not turned into a "trial of strength."

Resumption of Nuclear Tests

Khrushchev's willingness to accept the incalculable political and propaganda costs entailed by the resumption of nuclear tests is a good measure of the seriousness of his concern that his whole Berlin strategy had been placed in jeopardy by the closure of the Berlin sector border and by the failure of his earlier demonstrative military measures to produce a change in the Western attitude. He recognized that the drastic action to halt the refugee flow had severely damaged Soviet efforts to present the Ulbricht regime as a sovereign and respectable negotiating partner and that, as a consequence, his aim of extracting Western concessions implying at least de facto recognition of East Germany had been seriously compromised.

In this situation, Khrushchev invoked the weapon of nuclear intimidation as a more forceful means of demonstrating the USSR's military strength and determination to force a change in the status of West Berlin. He probably calculated that a resumption of tests would place the USSR in the

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strongest possible position to carry out the long-threatened action to sign a separate peace treaty in the event the West refused to enter negotiations or rejected Soviet terms for a settlement.

Moscow sought to enhance the effect of the testing announcement by stating on 1 September that military exercises using advanced modern weapons would be conducted by the Northern Fleet, jointly with the Rocket Troops and the Air Force, in the Barents and Kara seas in September and October. The Warsaw Pact defense ministers followed this with an announcement on 10 September of their decision to work out "practical measures" to strengthen bloc defense. On 25 September, Moscow announced that Warsaw Pact forces would conduct exercises in October and November.

Moves to End Impasse

After setting in train this bloc-wide series of military demonstrations, Khrushchev began to shift his political line back to a more flexible and positive attitude toward negotiations. He appeared to recognize the dangers of a situation in which both sides might feel confronted with the alternatives of a humiliating retreat or a showdown which could escape control. Khrushchev now is seeking to work his way out of this impasse.

In a speech at Stalingrad on 10 September, he went to some lengths to attribute to each of the Western leaders a willingness to begin negotiations and concluded that "glimpses of hope

now have appeared" for "peaceful talks."



This approach was spelled out in greater detail in a speech on 6 October by Ulbricht, who proposed that both sides agree on "special arrangements" for a Berlin solution and on "declarations containing guarantees before the conclusion of a peace treaty." These arrangements, he said, would then be incorporated in the peace treaty with East Germany.

This formula for a separate four-power agreement on Berlin and a Soviet guarantee of East German performance in executing access controls is clearly designed to meet Western objections to a unilateral transfer of controls by maintaining an outward appearance of the status quo and continuing Soviet responsibility for Allied access. Khrushchev probably hopes thus to persuade the West that negotiations could lead to a compromise which would protect the Western position in Berlin but at the same time allow the Soviet Union a free hand to proceed with a peace treaty with East Germany. He probably

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feels that incorporation in a separate treaty of a four-power agreement and a Soviet guarantee of access would greatly reduce the risks of signing a separate treaty and could even be represented as at least tacit Western consent to this treaty.

This formula would also allow the bloc unilaterally to declare West Berlin a free city after the signing of the separate treaty but at the same time permit the West to interpret the agreement as an endorsement of the existing status. Khrushchev's proposed compromise, however, would in fact require the Western powers to concede the USSR's fundamental demand for a change in the status of West Berlin and an end to the Western "occupation regime."

Position on Separate Treaty

Khrushchev is personally deeply committed to signing a treaty with East Germany, which he desires not only as an important step toward general international recognition of the East German regime but also to establish a better legal basis for the definitive acceptance of present German frontiers. He can therefore be expected to press hard for any arrangements with the West which he judges will free his hands for proceeding with the separate treaty.

While it is too early to exclude the possibility that Khrushchev, as a fallback position, might again defer a separate treaty and settle for some form of interim agreement that placed a definite time

limit on existing Western rights in West Berlin, his present program apparently calls for going through with a separate treaty unless he should come to believe that the Western attitude would pose unacceptable risks of war for such a course. He is now much more deeply committed to signing a treaty with East Germany than he was in the earlier phases of his Berlin operation in 1959 and 1960. He would find it difficult to represent as a major victory in 1961 an interim solution along the lines of Soviet proposals at the Geneva foreign ministers' conference in 1959.

Soviet View of West's Intentions

The Soviet leaders appear confident that the recent exchanges between Secretary Rusk and Foreign Minister Gromyko will open the way for formal East-West negotiations before the end of the year. They are still relying, however, on the combination of pressures and inducements to bring the West to the bargaining table under conditions favorable to the USSR. At a public lecture in Moscow on 26 September, the speaker stated categorically that the Rusk-Gromyko talks would be followed by negotiations. He expressed optimism that a peaceful solution would ensue and cited the US-Soviet agreement of 20 September on a statement of principles for disarmament negotiations as an indication that the Berlin question would be resolved peacefully.

Soviet spokesmen are also still expressing confidence that the West will eventually agree to a Berlin settlement rather than face the risks of an East-West conflict to maintain the

status quo in Berlin. Khrushchev told Yugoslav Foreign Minister Popovic in July that the chances of war were not more than 5 percent and that when the Western powers discovered that the separate treaty would not introduce any really substantive changes in access procedures, "they will swallow it." In his interview with New York Times correspondent Suizberger on 5 September, Khrushchev again predicted that the West would not go to war over the signing of a peace treaty and remarked that America's Western European allies are, "figuratively speaking, hostages to us and a guarantee against war."

Gromyko, in his speech to the UN General Assembly on 26 September, expressed skepticism in regard to Western willingness to resort to force, saying, "There is a great difference between statements about readiness to use force and the actual use of force, if account is taken of what such a use of force would mean"

Despite these continuing expressions of confidence that the West can be pressured and induced to make negotiated concessions, it seems likely that the US attitude on Berlin has caused Khrushchev to raise his estimate of American willingness to defend the Western position and of the risks carried by unilateral Communist actions. The firm US position has sharpened Khrushchev's dilemma in managing his Berlin policy. He can have no illusions that he could escape serious damage to his personal prestige and authority in the Communist bloc, the international Communist movement, and throughout the world if he should retreat or abandon his Berlin demands. Khrushchev is under heavy pressure to achieve a success on Berlin which he can use to demonstrate the

effectiveness and correctness of his entire strategic line in dealing with the West.

It was this strategy which produced the bitter collision with the Chinese Communists, because Khrushchev's policy of limited detente and negotiations in 1959 and 1960 cut directly across Peiping's interests, which demanded unremitting hostility to the West. The Sino-Soviet dispute has substantially narrowed Khrushchev's field of maneuver and has created constant pressure on Moscow for bolder, more militant actions in the foreign policy field. Any suggestion that Khrushchev's tactics on Berlin and a separate peace treaty were mere bluff or that he was backing down in the face of Western demonstrations of military power would inflict irreparable damage to his position as leader of the Communist bloc.

Khrushchev's actions appear to be strongly motivated by an awareness that time is running out on his Berlin operation and that considerations of personal prestige and authority will rule out any further prolonged delays in bringing the whole matter to a head. Under these circumstances, Khrushchev probably would not hesitate to undertake even more threatening and increasingly risky tactics should he be confronted with further manifestations of Western strength and firmness on Berlin. If his recent gestures toward working out a compromise Berlin accord along the lines of his remarks to Spaak failed draw a favorable Western response, he would almost certainly feel compelled to intensify the war of nerves in a final effort to prevent the West from forcibly opposing unilateral Communist action following the conclusion of a treaty with East Germany.